

See discussions, stats, and author profiles for this publication at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/287929626>

Dostoevsky: Expressions in Silence

Article · January 2000

DOI: 10.1163/23752122-00101001

CITATIONS

0

READS

16

2 authors, including:



Peter D. Mathews

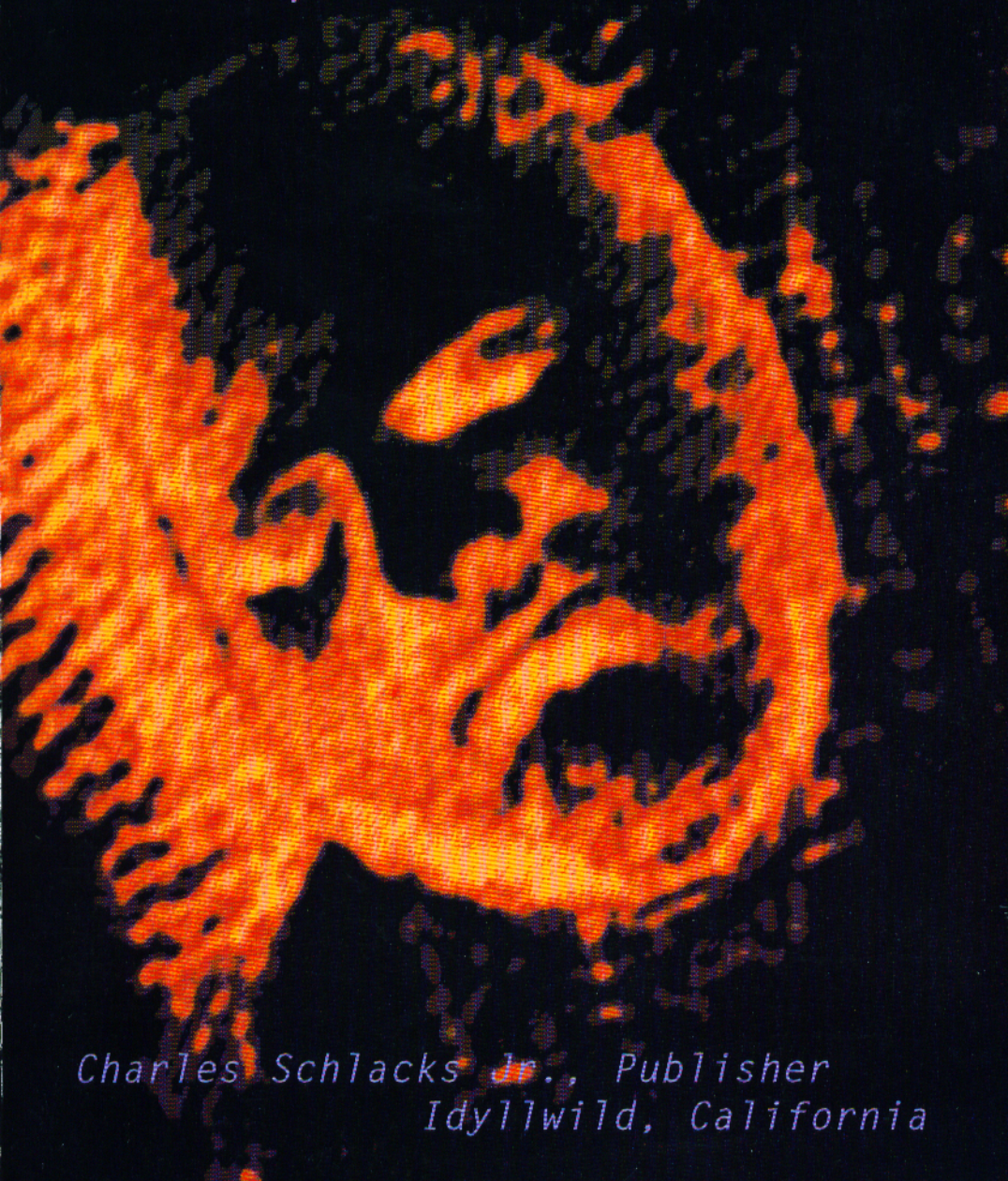
Hanyang University

72 PUBLICATIONS 19 CITATIONS

SEE PROFILE

Vol. 1 2000

The Dostoevsky Journal: An Independent review



Charles Schlacks Jr., Publisher
Idyllwild, California

Metaphor as Sujet in Dostoevsky's "Krokodil"
N. V. Zhivolupova 123

The Dostoevsky Journal: An Independent Review, 1 (2000), 1-9.

XpoHomonuan mempada nosrnum /JocmoeecKoeo e KOHmexcme
6ojibuioeo epeAienu
PHTa KneHMaH 131

ARTICLES/CTATbH

Dostoevsky and Shalamov: Orpheus and Pluto
Elena Mikhailik 147

PETER MATHEWS and BRYAN COOKE

REVIEWS/ PEIJEH3HH

T. A. KacaTKHHa. *Xapmmepojiozwi JJocmoeecKoa (K)*. ByTapoBa H O.
HorOBHUUH) 159

Ruben Zimmermann, Hrsg. *Bildersprache verstehen* (Dorothee Gelhard) 164

DOSTOEVSKY: EXPRESSIONS IN SILENCE

Perhaps more than any other figure in the canon, Dostoevsky is equated by literary and critical discourses with an absolute encapsulation of the psyche and the world - life as a "whole," unabridged and unfettered, life with not only warts, but boils, pustules and syphilis. The contribution of Mikhail Bakhtin's metalinguistic theories to the field of Dostoevsky studies marks the belated arrival of an "open" hermeneutic and the possibility of a heterogeneous interpretation.

Bakhtin's analysis ranges widely, from the Menippean tradition in such ancient authors as Plato and Apuleius, to the carnival tradition of the medieval period in Dante, Rabelais and Cervantes, to the apex of these traditions, as he sees it, in the modern novels of Dostoevsky. Bakhtin analyzes the historical rise of the novel in concert with a movement away from the epic mode. The epic, argues Bakhtin, was a way of writing rooted in the "monological," where all elements of the narrative conformed to an architectonic, unifying logic. The novel, therefore, was not merely a stylistic break (because it allowed the incorporation of various registers of literary discourse into a single body of work) but also a philosophical break, since the literary work now conforms to a single logic. The novel, according to Bakhtin, is the literary mode of the "dialogical" and of the "many voices" (polyglossia). Bakhtin's approach thus represents a break with traditional ways of reading literature in general and Dostoevsky in particular. We suspect that Bakhtin's analysis has a double target, that by tracing the transformation from monological to dialogical in the field of literature, he is pointing an accusatory finger, at criticism's failure to emulate this paradigm shift. It is the literary critic who has held back the dialogic reading of literature by subjecting it to monological "inquisition".

The scramble to assign motives (in other words, to extract a confession in the inquisitorial tradition) which characterizes monological reduction has cluttered the field of Dostoevsky studies with numerous attempts to allocate reasons for Raskol'nikov's murder of the old woman in *Crime and Punishment* and Nastasia Filippovna's failure to marry in *The Idiot*. The hermeneutical methodology seems dedicated to the inquisitorial assignation of mo-

tives: not simply the motives of characters and actions presented in the novels, but also the motivations of Dostoevsky himself as an ostensibly comprehensible (read: translatable) *deus ex machina* which may be used to totalize and systematize its products in terms of motives, intentions and socio-psychological roles. This technique has usually been tied to a mode of discourse in which critics play the part of Legion, taking possession of Dostoevsky's characters, having them chained and placed under the heavy guard of the academy, only breaking free occasionally in order to gleefully skulk around the local graveyard.¹ The critic was required to place himself or herself "in the shoes of" Raskol'nikov, Roghozin, Stavrogin, Dmitri Karamazov, as an "excarnation," a "flesh made god." This methodology proclaimed itself "objective," merging the critic with the character by identification, bringing to consciousness reasonable motives for his or her actions. The ethical imposture of this method was its liberatory claim of allowing the characters to express what could not be said openly in the novel. What these critics of the "search for the motive" overlook is that they are doing no more than replicating the power relationships already established in the texts. Their claim is neither "liberatory" nor "objective," but is correctly labelled "inquisitorial". An anthropomorphic god (the critic as "flesh made god") is advantageous insofar as "it" provides a useful and (so psychoanalysis tells us) sufficiently paternal visage for an inquisitor. It is a natural outcome of inquisition, within its logic of moral reprehensibility, law, structure and free will, to assume that the creation of anything so diverse and pluralistic as a world or a work of art demands a law that codifies and totalizes: "In the beginning there *must have been* a commandment." The search for motives is linked directly to the power of the confessional, secular or otherwise, in the ecclesiastical tradition, exemplified by Ivan Karamazov's allegory of the Grand Inquisitor. Dostoevsky writes in his notebooks: "They call me a psychologist: this is not true. I am merely a realist in a higher sense, i.e., I depict all the depths of the human soul."² Analyzing this claim, Malcolm Jones writes: "What he may be disowning is the kind of two-edged psychology which Porfiry Petrovich tries successfully on Raskolnikov. Porfiry's success derives from the fact that he does not regard it as a sure method of working out the truth, but rather as a *strategy for provoking a confession*. This is an important distinction."

And so it is. It is Dostoevsky himself who initiates the dissociation of his work from the inquisitorial search for motives. Confessions pour from the pages of his texts ("Stavrogin's Confession," for example, the posthumous restoration to *The Devils*) but they constitute a radically different project, a project that is a critique, not an affirmation, of the monological search for the motive. Like Nietzsche, Dostoevsky is an eminently esoteric thinker and, as Gilles Deleuze warns, to bring a monological interpretation to either of these great thinkers is to turn their radical thoughts into those of "a prophet, a fascist or a madman ..." - or worse, a mere "moralist".⁴

At the forefront of the inquisitorial literature is a famous essay by Freud titled "Dostoevsky and Parricide." Predictably, Freud is less interested in the fiction of Dostoevsky than his "rich personality." His approach to Dostoevsky shares more than a passing resemblance to the case study of Judge Schreber where, as with Dostoevsky, analyst and analysand never met and Freud's conclusions are based solely on the analysand's writings, symptomatic of his belief in a "science" of authorial psychology as productive disease and clinical condition. Freud identifies four aspects of Dostoevsky's complex personality around which his analysis will rotate, the roles of Dostoevsky "the creative artist, the neurotic, the moralist and the sinner."⁵ The role of creative artist is not really in dispute, claims Freud, but as the essay progresses it becomes clear that creativity is the condition around which the other facets revolve. To summarize Freud's argument as concisely as possible, Dostoevsky's role of creative artist is the most prominent symptom of his personality, whereas the other three are assigned subordinate functions as psychological causes that determine the patterns and formations of that symptom. Hence Freud's position at the forefront of those critics who hunt the motive in Dostoevsky's fiction.

It should be noted that Freud has already slipped into psychoanalytic verbiage before saying so explicitly, dividing the ethical domain into a relentless superego (the "moralist" in Dostoevsky: the police, the inquisitor, and so on), the id (the "sinner," who imparts deep, unconscious and, usually, murderous impulses) and the ego (the "neurotic" subject at the center of the whirlwind, torn between the opposing forces of the id and the superego). The "creative artist" in Dostoevsky is a symptom of a neurosis that sublimates itself in his art. Here we have the condensed version of a psychoanalytic theory of art. What remains of Dostoevsky is poor fatherless Fedor, an ambivalently moral-

1. The allusion to "Legion" has a double resonance. Firstly, it refers to the biblical story of the demon-possessed man told in Luke 8: 26-39. When Jesus asks the demon its name, it replies "Legion" because many demons had possessed the man. Dostoevsky quotes verses 32-36 as the epigraph to *The Devils*, and uses the metaphor of demon-possession in relation to the political nihilists in the novel.

2. Dostoevsky quoted in M. Jones, *Dostoyevsky after Bakhtin: Readings in Dostoyevsky's fantastic realism* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1990), p. 77.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 78, original emphasis.

4. G. Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1983), p. xii. The quotation comes from Deleuze's "Preface to the English Translation," written in 1983, rather than from the body of the original text.

5. S. Freud, "Dostoevsky and Parricide", in *Standard Edition* (London: Hogarth Press, 1961), 21:177.

istic "Batman," torn between the comic book sides of "justice" and a transgressive "inner darkness" manifest in his fiction. His works are a fusion of these two themes in the vigilantism of an Oedipal *aufhebung*. This error of agency, this monological assignation of motive, is perceived as absolutely explanatory. Its reductive outlook replaces the "Oh, it's his anti-Chernyshevsky again" with "Ah! It's his repressive little superego manifesting itself as 'the greatest novel ever written'." Would that all neurosis produced such literature!

Freud wrote his essay on Dostoevsky before the appearance of Bakhtin's *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, of course, but our fundamental concern with contemporary Dostoevsky criticism remains that although Bakhtin is hailed as the "messiah" of Dostoevsky criticism, this praise is often lip service such that dialogic analysis, in practice, is overlooked. This seems to be particularly true of the psychoanalytic tradition. Malcolm Jones, for example, uses the work of the radical psychologist R. D. Laing, in a chapter devoted to *Crime and Punishment*, to reshape that novel's own famous brand of "psychology". As the title of his book (*Dostoevsky After Bakhtin*) proclaims, his analysis will attempt to surpass Bakhtin's arguments about "polyphony" and the third person narrative structure. Jones argues that *Crime and Punishment*, for example, delves into areas that Bakhtin's theory does not - and cannot - penetrate successfully: ". . . the novel exemplifies . . . what may happen when people attempt mutually to objectify and classify each other, seek to impose two or more incompatible images on another person at the same time, and deploy emotionally disturbing strategies on each other. This is an area into which Bakhtin declines to venture."⁶ Jones goes on to call for an understanding of the novel that resembles a latent Hegelianism:

In the person of the protagonist, Raskolnikov, the novel exemplifies an inner conflict between emotional demands for objectification . . . and (inter) subjectivity. The one enables him to contemplate and in part to commit his murder through labelling himself as a "great man" and Alyona Ivanovna as a "louse" within a system of ideas which permits members of the former category under certain conditions to dispose of the lives of members of the latter. The other leads to his relationship with Sonya.

Jones does not attempt to place himself "in the shoes" of the characters. Instead he supplies his own pair of shoes, a double movement between subjectivity and objectivity, between generality and particularity. The psycho-

analytic theory grants him the inquisitorial power of monologizing the novel - everything is explicable from a homogeneous point of view, all Raskolnikov's conflicting confessions now fall on one side or the other of the line between objectification and intersubjectivity. For all the Laingian overlay (including the superfluous inclusion of the prescriptive "six modes of driving other people crazy") Jones does not surpass Bakhtin at all.⁸ He returns merely to a veiled form of the Freudian brand of monologism - the conflict between the id ("emotional demands for objectification") and the superego ("(inter)subjectivity") as Raskolnikov attempts to reconcile his ego (to attain "inner balance," as Jones puts it).⁹ Jones is typical of monologism in its psychoanalytic guise - he does not search for motives as much as he supplies his own prepackaged set.

In spite of her allegiance with Bakhtin in *Desire In Language*, Julia Kristeva's chapter "Dostoyevsky, Suffering, Forgiveness" also falters because of its unquestioning appropriation of the psychoanalytic framework. Kristeva "radicalizes" the Oedipal complex by giving pride of place to the Mother-Child symbiosis. Tracing *Crime and Punishment* as a search for lost maternal love (through the trinity of Sonia, Dunia and Raskolnikov's mother) Kristeva's analysis surprisingly ends up reproducing the familiar Oedipal triangle. Just as disturbing is her reinscription of this framework in moral terms, as a cycle of transgression, the "working through" of guilt, and the liberation through forgiveness - passed off as the interplay between the pleasure principle and the death drive, "the two forces (positive and negative) specific to drive arid desire."¹⁰ Kristeva ultimately reduces Dostoevsky to a psychoanalytic stage. "Suffering," the predominant feature of his fiction, according to Kristeva, "is the first or the last attempt on the part of the subject to assert his 'own and proper' at the closest point to threatened biological unit and to narcissism put to the test. Consequently this humoral exaggeration, this pretentious swelling of one's 'own and proper' states an essential given of the psyche in the process of being set up or collapsing under the sway of an already dominant Other, although still unrecognized in its powerful otherness, under the gaze of the ego ideal riveted to the ideal ego."¹¹

It is in Nietzsche, the great confessor of our time (the Nietzschean corpus is nothing but a string of confessions, from *Human All Too Human* ["the monument of a crisis"] to *Ecce Homo* ["how one becomes what one is"]) that the conspiracy against the Dionysian power of the confession (namely, the

⁸. *ibid.*, p. 84.

⁹. *ibid.*

¹⁰. J. Kristeva, "Dostoyevsky, Suffering, Forgiveness," in *Black Sun: Depression And Melancholia* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1989), p. 186. ¹¹ *U.Ibid.*, p. 182.

6. Jones, *Dostoevsky After Bakhtin*, p. 77.

7. *ibid.*

inquisition, which renders the confession *powerless*) is stretched on the iron rack of counter-logic until it, too, confesses. It is well known that Nietzsche read Dostoevsky (he first encountered *Notes from Underground* in a French translation). In *The Anti-Christ* he speaks of Christ as an "idiot," and refers to the world of the Gospels as "a world like that of a Russian novel, in which refuse of society, neurosis and 'childlike' idiocy seem to make a rendez-vous."¹² Nietzsche argues that not every question *extorts* a confession from the object to whom it is addressed. Questions produce a kind of resonance, with various possible expressions, with thoughts, with articulations, with music. The word "reason" is only a musical link between them, alluding to their birth in the whirlpool of a chaosmos. An inquisition, on the other hand, requires, indeed demands, an assignation: it requires unity, totality, a final homogeneity and final Order, an end point that refers to both teleology and topography.

The inquisitorial weapon of choice is the assignation (note that there is, ironically, no "choice") of free will. The product of free will, the so-called "*sovereign individual*," is not modeled on "the way things are" but is rather the consequence of the enforcement of a morality (or, more precisely, the conditions of the possibility of a morality).¹³ We are "forced to be free" as Rousseau says with absolute sincerity.¹ The declaration of free will is an act of moral pragmatism: since free will assigns the individual as the cause of action, the contingent fact arises that he or she is (morally) responsible for the effects produced by that action. The concept of free will is therefore retained amongst the array of "philosophical prejudices" (of, for example, the legal system) because it is conditional for the fabrication of (moral) responsibility, in spite of the continual calling into question of the relations of cause and effect. To undermine free will as Nietzsche does is to "shoot at morals."¹ The search for the motive or cause in Dostoevsky is therefore predicated on the establishment of an inquisitorial morality by which his works may be judged.

Psychoanalysis makes out that it has a complex relationship with morality because it purports to complicate the cause and effect relationship. Its fundamental ambiguity is summed up in the choice of Oedipus as its figurehead: was Oedipus guilty of murdering his father and committing incest with his mother? At a conscious level, the answer is no, but at an unconscious level, the answer is yes. The question Freud raises for ethics rests on whether a subject can be culpable when death drives are unconscious, when the individual,

in the wake of psychoanalysis and the discovery of the unconscious, is no longer sovereign. The legal system had long made an exception for the insane, but how would it cope when, according to Freud, everyone is to some extent insane? The echoes of Pascal's famous maxim resonate long and loud behind this question.¹⁶ But Freud's conservatism is familiar, and psychoanalysis' radical question reverts, in such works as *Civilization And Its Discontents*, to a bland form of Rousseauism. Freud writes: ". . . our civilization is largely responsible for our misery, and . . . we should be much happier if we gave it up and returned to primitive conditions . . . a person becomes neurotic because he cannot tolerate the amount of frustration which society imposes on him . . . and it was inferred from this that the abolition or reduction of these demands would result in a return to possibilities of happiness."¹⁷

It is in the face of the search for the motive that Bakhtin institutes two critical concepts, dialogue and ambivalence.¹⁸ The dialogues in Dostoevsky are famous, not only at the level of speech (the verbal jousting between Raskol'nikov and Porfiry about the justification of "criminal acts, for example) but also in the spatial construction of the novels (Myshkin and Rogozhin, one light, one dark, face each other off in the opening scene of *The Idiot*). As a result of this explosive coexistence between opposing discourses, ambivalence seeps into the fabric of the text. In *Crime and Punishment*, for example, the dialogues in which Raskol'nikov participates interplay with his motivational confessions. The dialogues destabilize the inquisitorial possibility of pinning down his crime to any single motive.

The elusiveness of the dialogical technique is explored in detail by Australian Dostoevsky critic Slobodanka Vladiv-Glover. Her early essay, "The Use of Circumstantial Evidence in Dostoevskii's Works," starts from a consideration of the "motif of the unproven or unprovable murder case" and links it to the way that Dostoevsky's poetics coincide with "the ontological structure of meaning and of the process of generation of ideas."¹⁹ Vladiv-Glover's essay plays on the repetition of the word "process" and its European resonance (*le proces* (French) and *der prozess* (German), for example, have overlapping

16. Pascal wrote in *Pensees*: "Men are so necessarily mad that it would be another twist of madness not to be mad." From B. Pascal, *Pensees and other writings* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1995), p. 9.

17. S. Freud, *Civilization And Its Discontents* in *Civilization, Society and Religion* (London: Penguin, 1991), pp. 274-75.

18. Kristeva takes these concepts as the basic axes for her theory of the novel, and develops from them the celebrated poststructural term "intertextuality". See J. Kristeva, "Word, Dialogue and Novel," in *Desire In Language: A Semiotic Approach To Literature And Art* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980), p. 66.

19. S. Vladiv, "The Use of Circumstantial Evidence in Dostoevskii's Works," *Canadian-American Slavic Studies*, 12, No. 3 (Fall 1978), 353-54.

12. F. Nietzsche, *Twilight Of The Idols/The Anti-Christ* (London: Penguin, 1990), pp. 153-54.

13. F. Nietzsche, *On The Genealogy Of Morals* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1996), p. 41.

14. J. Rousseau, *The Social Contract* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1994), p. 58.

15. Nietzsche, *Twilight Of The Idols*, p. 36.

connotations of both "procedure" and "trial" - hence the Kafkaesque overtones in Vladiv-Glover's essay) and Raskol'nikov's "trial run" or "*proba*" to announce the impossibility of obtaining a "*truth* [that] may never be proven conclusively and beyond all doubt."²⁰ Vladiv-Glover evokes an elaborate, interwoven structure of facts, hypotheses and theories - an entire torture chamber of inquisitorial tools, in effect - a machinery or factory of truth that is parodied by Dostoevsky because of its overproduction.²¹ There is literally an oversupply of "truths," jostling and contradicting each other. Thus Raskol'nikov claims that he killed for philosophical reasons ("crime is a protest against the unnatural structure of society"²²), for political reasons ("I wanted to make myself a Napoleon, and that is why I killed her"²³), and even for pure egoism ("I murdered for myself, for myself alone"²⁴). Vladiv-Glover shows deftly that Dostoevsky's novels deliberately elude inquisition, and in so doing chase a confession that is never quite present.

Bakhtin's dialogism exhorts us to see Dostoevsky's *oeuvre* not as the work of a structural psychology (as a science which is subject to empirical testing, Reason, the law, judgment) but as a kind of non-metaphysical psychological *chaosmology*, and a return to a genuinely Nietzschean perspectivism. Perspectivism differs from the "objectivity" of science in so far as it jettisons "explanations" in favor of "interpretations": ". . . our world has become 'infinite' for us all over again, in as much as we cannot reject the possibility that *it may contain infinite interpretations*." To interpret does not mean simply fitting templates over accommodating surfaces. Between Dostoevsky's major novels there exists, far beyond Freud's "topographical" model of the unconscious, a whole productive mapping of these infinite interpretations. Dostoevsky's great revelation is that of an absolute dynamism that permeates the psyche: the fluid, asignifying, strictly untranslatable, and gleefully profound exigencies and intensities of the populated, non-mimetic ("in a higher sense") unconscious - a pluralistic, terrible, cross-historical version of psychical life.

For what are we left with in the wake of psychoanalytic monologism? Dostoevsky the epileptic. The neurotic. Dostoevsky the great Director of Dialogism. Dostoevsky the anti-radical. Dostoevsky who suffered through the Oedipal myth in a most "telling" concrete sense - the literary manifestation of guilt for the quite literally murdered father. To traditional criticism, Dostoevsky is merely a god or icon-producing machine: every facet, every "twitch in a character's toe" (Lawrence) is a mere grimace on the face of the Creator,

who is inherently archetypal and reducible: Dostoevsky the ideologue, the zealot, the Christian, the repressed artist/moralist. Every chain or semblance or landscape, every psychical, aesthetic territory is treated not as a rolling ball of pluralism (a flurry of tinctures and textures) but as a codified allegory.

And so we come to the crux of our argument: to point to a "new" way of reading Dostoevsky which remains true to the heterogeneous nature of his writings rather than merely paying lip service to "polyphony" and "heteroglossia". As Deleuze writes in *Difference and Repetition*, "It is not enough to multiply perspectives in order to establish perspectivism."²⁶ In other words, what is needed is not so much a "new" method or philosophy of reading Dostoevsky as an analysis which faithfully follows through the radical nature of Bakhtin's dialogism. It is time to drive out once and for all the Legion of Dostoevsky critics.

Crime and Punishment is a novel of psychical wandering, and Raskol'nikov's confessions are the notes that weave a pied piper's refrain which runs through the unconscious. For ourselves, we confess in order to mislead, as other pipers have done before us. There is malice in this act, and a desire to "be done with the judgment of god."²⁷ It is a pre-emptive, but also a very light, very joyful, culpable act. We confess in advance, to all and any of our misdeeds, to an excess of violence, an excess of memory, and a polemic against a variety of discourses (psychoanalytic, humanist, structuralist) all, interestingly enough, in the play of Dostoevsky criticism.

So the question arises. Why must we confess? Our confession is an overcoming of the will to truth and the subsequent attribution of motives. To overcome the psychology of guilt, that is, the psychology of *purpose*. There is, of course, blood on our hands. Between us, in an obtuse, subtle, molecular sense there is the blood of entire dimensions: tiny cosmoses of spontaneity, of movement and affectivity: dimensions of sensuality, interpretation, language, philosophy, perhaps even residues of our-"selves" as split, joint, doubled, obscure and apocryphal: hidden and manifestly overt subjects: a cacophony of noise, and a buzz of "feverish" thoughts - like the continuous noise in Dostoevsky, of thoughts and psychical processes in a world characterized by the silence of God.

Monash University

20. *Ibid.*, p. 366.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 359.

22. F. Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1995), p. 245.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 397.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 402.

25. F. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (New York: Vintage, 1974), p. 336, aphorism 374.

26. G. Deleuze, *Difference And Repetition* (London: Athlone, 1994), p. 69. 27. G. Deleuze & F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press 1987), p. 150.